



Aspects of Organizational Knowledge Discourse related to Knowledge Management

P. L. Andreeva

European University, Business School of Munich, Germany

Abstract. This paper presents an attempt to address aspects of tacit and explicit knowledge in organizational knowledge management. The paper gives a brief analysis of narrations, transmitting a verbal knowledge and their links to the organisational culture. Some aspects of discursive knowledge, based on arguments are discussed, as well as the role of discourses as storytelling, creating informal organizational norms and company's basic assumptions. The article makes a short review on the literature with a focus on the role of the knowledge discourses for managing successful sustainable businesses. The organizations are seen as an integrated system combining a formal and a social dimension. This research paper gives an outlook of storytelling as a method contributing to the transfer of tacit knowledge in organizational settings. The study presents some aspects for a distinction between the discursive as explicit and narrative as a path for transforming tacit to explicit knowledge. In a broad sense the aim of this analysis is to contribute to the understanding of the dual nature of management function with its interrelating elements of science and art.

1 Introduction

The role of storytelling in organisations (Boje, 1991) and the processes of interaction in organizational settings (Weick, 1995) relates to the organizational culture. Narratives are considered as particular way of transferring tacit knowledge (Nonaka et al., 2000). To understand better the role of the storytelling to the knowledge management, it is appropriate to refer to the analyses of the organizational culture (Schein, 1992) represented as such of having three levels: artifacts, values and core assumptions. The core assumptions are intangible as well as the values and they both are a vital part of the organizational tacit knowledge. They form the content of the visible artifacts as physical assets and contribute to the verbal storytelling and textual discourses. The behavioural expression of the organizational culture refers to rewards, ceremonies and established company methods of communication.

Discourses contribute to the context that brings changes in knowledge through speaking, acting and materializing (Wodak and Meyer, 2001). The concept is visualized in a form of triangle with three "transit points". First "discursive practices in which primarily knowledge is transported", second point "actions as non-discursive practices, in which however, knowledge is transported, which are presided by knowledge and/or constantly accompanied by knowledge" and the last point "manifestations which represent materializations of discursive practices through non-discursive practices". The existence of manifestations (innovations) can be considered in a simplified model as being realized through discursive and non-discursive practices. Analysing analytically the context of discourses with consequent action and innovation can contribute for better understanding of knowledge management (KM) in organisations. Bridging the theoretical approach of discourse analysis and empirical research on organizational culture provides further insights in the area of KM. To understand the discourses it is often used an interpretative approach, where the data is constantly collected during the analysis based on the Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).



2 Discursive and Narrative Knowledge

The meaning of Knowledge can be understood from two perspectives: in the view of information theory and the pragmatist phenomenological view. In the first concept knowledge is conceived as emerging from combination of information in accomplishing a specific task. The second approach is concerned with the process of knowing. Knowledge and a successful action are present in the definition of an innovation.

Knowledge has been classified under two categories explicit and tacit (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka 1994). Explicit knowledge is understood as verbal, transferable and can be stored. Tacit is nonverbal, such as personal competence that can't be explained. Both represent two structurally different dimensions regarding Polanyi. Tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit regarding the "knowledge spiral" of Nonaka.

There are some differences and relationships between discursive and narrative knowledge (Lyotard, 1991). This framework of dividing knowledge in two groups – scientific and narrative, can help in better understanding the driving forces for higher value intellectual property and the role of discourses for organizational KM. If we accept the assumption that scientific knowledge is not complete but adds to the narrative knowledge. Scientific and narrative are two types of discursive knowledge. In this framework discourses are defined as language systems that are ruledetermined and not able to legitimate their own rules.

The narrative knowledge express know-how and emotions with simultaneously conveying a justification of the statement. Within each organizational culture both – the discursive and the narrative knowledge coexist by representing different dimensions of organizational knowledge. When the narratives determine the organizational culture, the "meta-narrative" can be powerful and to regulate which type stories are allowed. This can create closed state. In companies with strong culture their norms defining what is normal can create a closure for any new idea and innovations. On the other hand the narrative approach uses language with metaphors and allows various interpretations of the same story. The emotional presentation of the storytelling can influence the acceptance and easy transmission of the tacit knowledge.

2 Knowledge as Storytelling

The company storytelling are used to express employee values, beliefs and assumptions. They serve as a tool of socializing and help for understanding and sense making. Organizational Culture can be defined (Shein, 1992) as basic assumptions invented by a given group created while dealing with challenges of the company adaptation to external environment and the internal integration. The assumptions that have worked well are consequently accepted as valid and taught to the new members as the right and correct way of perceiving, thinking and feeling as response to similar challenges. KM in a form of storytelling and sense making refers to organizational change and contributes to innovations (Weick, 1995). If properly understood the role of the storytelling the knowledge can be managed to support improvements in organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Narratives are seen as important input for organizational changes (Schreyögg and Koch, 2005). There is growing interest on the role of the storytelling, being considered even as the all knowledge being embedded in narratives (Wenger, 2008). Many reflections are based on studies of on Community of Practice considering "learning as a process of social participation". For understanding the organizational KM, the discourses such as storytelling are perceived of being linked to sense-making and organizational culture (Boje,1991; Weick, 1995; Schein, 1984).

There is an interesting question of how storytelling relates to knowledge. Some researchers argue that narrations are knowledge (Boje, 1995). Managers are commonly adopting the notion of creating



an organizational culture through narrative discourses, which supports their strategy. The topic of tacit knowledge deserves further attention since it can serve as driving force for KM.

Consequently knowledge discourses can be linked to innovations, which may contribute to the state of well-being of the organizational stakeholders. In the text-books on management, used at business schools, a commonly accepted approach taught to the future entrepreneurs is to create in organizations a learning context through teamwork and communications. The contemporary KM studies focus not only on creating an internal storytelling business context, but on expanding it and transferring tacit knowledge through collaboration, alliances and networking of business partners along the value chains. The interpretive approaches focusing on the sociocultural dimension of the organizations helped management to incorporate important motivational issues.

3 Knowledge Management in Organizations

Management studies are recognizing the growing role of the KM for organizational value creation. The competitive advantage of the companies is perceived to depend on the possession of intellectual properties and knowledgeable employees. The industrial societies are becoming a synonym of knowledge societies, with increased amount of knowledge accessible knowledge. In many organizations it is a challenge for the management of how to handle the knowledge assets.

Managers have to be able to understand the nature of the both dimensions of discursive and narrative knowledge in order to create an organizational culture that supports the strategy of the company. Regarding the contingency approach by which every organization is to be considered as a unique entity, managers can apply one or the other perspective depending on the particular situation.

In summary the transmission of tacit knowledge to explicit in a natural spontaneous way can be considered as an advantage of the narrative versus discursive knowledge. Any hidden tension in organizations may convert in organizational process disruption, while a proper usage of narrative approach can capitalize on expression of any suppressed knowledge.

KM in organization may face certain challenges while dealing with the narrative knowledge which can be misleading or used for manipulation. The quality of such verbal knowledge is difficult to be defined, being in a form of intangible asset. The interpretation of any narrative knowledge has to be interpreted only in the context in which it has been generated. An example of analysing managerial narratives is the Harvard case study approach (Geiger, 2005) which we analyse in respect to certain management theory, with purpose of learning lessons from the story.

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